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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted at the Thames Polytechnic's research and development unit at Garnett, England, to: (1) investigate the views of respondents regarding their educational approach to prevocationalism and staff development; and (2) identify viewpoints that were shared both within and between the provider and the client groups (and by implication, those which were not). Four perspectives derived from the literature of prevocationalism were used to guide the study. These were provisionally labeled the prevocational, the liberal educational, the radical, and the training perspective. The research sought to assess and refine this framework as a way of describing understandings of prevocationalism. Fifty providers of staff development opportunities located in colleges, universities, accredited training centers, polytechnics and local education authorities were interviewed. At a later stage, prevocational coordinators based in schools and colleges--clients of the staff development providers--were invited to complete a questionnaire. The major findings of the study indicated that providers strongly support prevocationalism, seeing it as an extension of, rather than an enemy to, liberal education. However, the degree of agreement among all providers on a broadly liberal-vocational standpoint was considerable. The client group as a whole supported many of the views taken by the majority of providers. However, in general they were less happy to see their teaching subject as a prevocational staff development starting point, less interested in the certification of staff development, and more likely to see the arts as marginalized in prevocational education. (NLL)

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PRE-VOCATIONAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Viewpoints of providers and clients

December 1988

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The past few years have seen a change of emphasis in modes of staff development, from long, external courses to shorter more varied learning programmes more closely related to the curriculum and to specific areas of institutional change. In terms of this trend, pre-vocational staff development has been a front-runner. Although increasing emphasis is being placed on needs analysis at various levels, little in the way of in-depth national surveys of the values and attitudes of staff and those who train them has been undertaken. At a time when funds are limited and efficient and effective provision is at a premium, this type of survey has much to commend it. Now more than ever we need to know what really works, and how best to provide for the learning needs of staff experiencing curriculum and institutional change.

Pre-vocational staff development provides an interesting case study in this respect, having most of the ingredients likely to be increasingly experienced by all staff in the future: radical changes in learning strategies; consequent need for institutional change; need to work more closely, on a team basis, with those external to their own institution; adaptation to new and potentially threatening roles *vis-à-vis* client groups; and, above all, profound challenges to teachers' personal values, implying a need to re conceptualise their way of looking at education and training and to work through role conflicts in the process.

Dr Eric Triggs' study summarised here was independently conducted at the Thames Polytechnic's R & D Unit at Garnett. It underlines the fact that the significant staff development task outlined above can be truly effective if a substantial programme of training is offered, reflecting the curriculum process and allowing maximum opportunities for exchange of views and experiences with other institutions, LEAs and sectors. Since it was conducted by means of a thorough and highly rigorous research methodology, the Unit attaches some importance to its findings. The in-depth report on which this summary bulletin is based is available on request. We record our grateful thanks to Dr Triggs for his work.

The project's aims

The research project described in this bulletin (RP354A) investigated the views of those concerned with staff development related to a number of pre-vocational courses – principally CPVE, TVEI and YTS. Fifty providers of staff development opportunities, located in colleges, RCBs, universities, Accredited Training Centres, polytechnics and LEAs were asked a series of questions relating to their views on pre-vocationalism and its staff development in a semi-structured interview. Interviews lasted approximately one hour.

At a later stage, pre-vocational co-ordinators based in schools and colleges – clients of the staff development providers – were invited to complete a 35-item postal questionnaire. Of these, 46.5% (398 responses) were returned by October 1987 when analysis began. The sampling proportion (FE to school staff) was well maintained in the responses.

The research had a two-fold objective:

- to investigate the views of respondents regarding their educational approach to pre-vocationalism and its staff development;

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- to identify viewpoints which were shared both within and between the provider and the client groups (and by implication, those which were not).

To guide these aims, four perspectives, derived from the literature of pre-vocationalism, were developed. Four characteristic approaches to pre-vocationalism were thought likely to be identifiable in all responses. These were provisionally labelled the pre-vocational, the liberal educational, the radical and the training perspective. The research sought to assess and refine this framework as a way of describing understandings of pre-vocationalism.

Main findings

The characteristic approach of the providers was to support strongly pre-vocationalism, seeing it as an extension of, rather than an enemy to, liberal education. Those working in Accredited Training Centres seemed to be slightly more strongly influenced by the specific and task-oriented approach which was taken to characterise a training perspective, while staff working in colleges, polytechnics and universities favoured the more individual, person-centred approaches emphasised by the radical viewpoint. However, the degree of agreement between all providers on a broadly liberal-vocational standpoint was considerable.

The client group as a whole supported many of the views taken by the majority of providers. There were some areas of specific disagreement, however. The part played by clients teaching subjects in staff development, the certification of staff development and the position of the arts in pre-vocationalism were particularly noticeable in this respect. Compared with the group of providers, clients were, in general:

- less happy to see their teaching subject as a pre-vocational staff development starting-point;
- less interested in the certification of staff development;
- more likely to see the arts as marginalised in pre-vocational education.

There was evidence of a trend within the tutor/trainer group towards a more externally determined view of pre-vocationalism than was evident in the provider group. Although there was definite and detailed support for the pre-vocational approach in general, liberal educational ideals seemed to emerge most clearly as a critique rather than as a firmly incorporated part of the way pre-vocational courses were interpreted. Analysis of questionnaire replies suggested that, alongside strong support for important elements in the pre-vocational curricula (such as curriculum negotiation and the important place of profiling in developing student-centred learning) there was an approval of clear objectives rather than general aims, and firm support for the development of computer profiling with guiding comment banks of one sort or another. Also present (though less strongly) seemed to be a critical account of pre-vocationalism based on familiar liberal education attacks – such as the claim that pre-vocational programmes over-emphasise the vocational, that the arts are marginalised, that exams are not necessary for programmes of this type.

The significance of this finding is heightened when sub-groups of the main sample are investigated. Several important differences emerge which suggest divisions between teacher sub-groups which are, in some cases, deeper than those which operated within the provider group. School and FE staff, for example, diverge on a number of issues concerning pre-vocational staff development in particular.

For example, in the choice made by staff from a list of topics deemed to be 'very important' for staff development consideration, while there is complete agreement concerning the two most important (developing integrated learning materials and counselling and guidance) and the two of least interest (the psychology of learning and the use of resources), FE lecturers tend to place topics such as fostering institutional innovation, working on institution-based projects and working with groups as more significant areas for staff development exploration than do school teachers.

Further analysis shows that school staff are, in general:

- less approving of in-house staff development than FE lecturers are;
- less interested in starting pre-vocational staff development from their own subject orientations (perhaps because they see these as sufficiently well covered already for their professional needs);
- less concerned that pre-vocational staff development should adopt the processes used with learners.

They are also:

- more likely to want staff development certificated than FE lecturers are;
- more likely to see industrial placement as an essential pre-vocational staff development activity;

- more firmly in favour of the usefulness of basic pre-vocational staff development courses than the FE group.

The factors into which each of these sub-samples fall also differ, with school staff, especially, seeking more external guidance and support than the FE group.

FE staff are more likely to stress whole-hearted support for many important features of pre-vocational curricula (negotiation of course content and process, the rejection of too heavy a vocational emphasis and of the idea that the arts are marginalised in pre-vocational education) than are school staff.

School staff emphasise the need for staff development certification, industrial placement on staff development and developing computerisation and comment banks for profiling as part of their predominant view of pre-vocational curricula.

Other sub-group analyses suggest that:

- Differences between clients in terms of the curriculum subjects they teach make comparatively little difference to the views they take of pre-vocational staff development.
- Those teaching on a variety of pre-vocational courses (a group largely located in FE colleges) were more likely to reflect the more robust approach of the FE sub-sample. They approved negotiated in-house staff development covering a range of pre-vocational courses and the extension of pre-vocational approaches across the curriculum more firmly than staff teaching on only one pre-vocational programme. They also gave a less important place to the development of computerisation and comment bank systems and staff development certification than the other group – all features of a more confident approach that could be strongly associated with the teaching of a range of pre-vocational courses rather than one alone.
- 20/30 day staff development programme experience does seem to have a particular and interesting effect on clients. This group (which was well balanced in terms of FE and school staff responding) more strongly supported some aspects of pre-vocationalism and its staff development than did those experiencing other forms of staff development. For example, they:
  - were more in favour of longer rather than shorter staff development programmes;
  - rejected the idea that pre-vocational programmes were excessively concerned with a behavioral-skills approach;
  - approved the usefulness of profiling as a focus of student learning;
  - approved the adoption of staff development processes used with learners.

  They were more likely to recognise the usefulness of computerisation, comment banks, external validation and industrial placement within staff development than were clients of other types of provision.

  20/30 day staff development, therefore, seems to bring to awareness the necessity of a supportive externally determined framework which was not so evident in the responses of other staff. These seemed to be sufficiently convinced of the benefits of pre-vocationalism and would see them extended to all students without further development.
- Involvement of staff in more or less full-time non-education related work before entering a teaching career did not seem to influence their views of pre-vocationalism.

Conclusion

There are a number of implications in this research for those engaged in pre-vocational work:

- There is much common ground within and between the group of staff developers and tutors sampled here, with strong support for the negotiated, profiled, work-related aspects of pre-vocationalism.
- Given this, a number of different emphases seem to emerge, chief of which are:
  - the more specific programme and objectives-led approach of some providers *vis-à-vis* the 'broad understanding' viewpoint taken by others;
  - the more confident and self-sufficient approach taken by most FE staff trained in CPVE versus the need for support in specific areas voiced by the majority of school CPVE teachers.
- This research suggests that:
  - *For staff developers*

    Consortia of providers, able to present the range of emphases present in their total group, would best suit the needs of the client cohort.
  - *For tutors*

    The clients of staff development, who give a different weighting to the perspectives on pre-vocationalism discussed in this bulletin, are likely to be best served by provision designed

to recognise and address these differences and allow views to be shared between institutions and courses – especially as there is evidence to suggest that particular views inhere in particular types of institutions.

– *For inspectors and advisers*

20/30 day provision seems to have had some effect in generating a more positive view of pre-vocationalism among its members than other types of staff development. It has also developed a pre-vocational perspective among its clients which sees the need for further support in specific areas of pre-vocational development. If the future of staff development is mainly in in-house 'one-off' provision, it is unlikely to bring about the broad-based forum for exchange of ideas, views and techniques that 20/30 day mixed-clientele courses seem to have achieved. Despite the preferences expressed by some staff for short-term, in-house staff development, the disappearance of longer, cross-institutional courses seems likely to locate particular views of pre-vocationalism within particular institutions and to reduce the degree of agreement over important pre-vocational issues that currently exist. Were this to happen, the development of national coherent standards in these courses would be jeopardised.

Further information and comment

Copies of Eric Triggs' full report and further copies of this bulletin are available from the FEU Information Centre, 2 Orange Street, London WC2H 7WE. (tel: 01-321 0433 ext. 256).

FEU would welcome comments on the content of this bulletin as well as information about pre-vocational staff development initiatives which relate to the cases raised by Dr Triggs. Comments and information should be addressed to Elizabeth Simpson at FEU (tel: 01-321 0433 ext. 272).